

Tarku among the Ancient Armenians

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The god Tarku was one of the supreme members of the Asianic pantheon. He was as glorious as Teshub, the greatest divinity of the Hatti people.

The geographical frontiers of these cults were rather extensive and also included neighboring Armenia. Armenia's pre-Armenian inhabitants were connected to the Hattian world, if not by blood ties, then at least by their general culture. This cultural affinity is demonstrated especially by their gods.

The gods Tarku and Teshub anciently were grouped among the most venerated in Armenia, judging from the enduring traces they left behind in the country—this even after their worship had died out, swallowed up in the mists of time. A remembrance of the veneration paid to Teshub on the shores of Lake Van may be seen in the theophoric name Tosp or Tospitis which was given sometimes to the city, sometimes to the lake, and/or to the entire Van area.

The name Tarku, similarly, outlived the god bearing that name. After being dethroned as a deity, Tarku continued to live on as the image of a folk hero, monster, or better, as a supernatural force.

The Armenian historian Movse's Xorenats'i speaks of a giant named T'ork', whom he compares with Rustem, hero of the Iranian epic [the *Shahname*]. We have examined the question of the origin of Tork' in another article (in *Yushardzan*, the jubilee edition of the Viennese Mxit'arists, 1911). [186] At that time several traits of this Armenian giant, including his surname Angegh, seemed very obscure to me. However, I believe that now I have found a solution—to present Tork' as a local variation of Tarku.

Speaking of Tork', Movse's Xorenats'i, provides the following description: "He was a man with severe features, having a very tall, rough shape, a flat nose, sunken crossed eyes, and a ferocious aspect. Tork' was a descendant of Pask'am, the grandson of Hayk, and they called him Anggh because of his great ugliness. He possessed great height and colossal strength. He was designated [by the king] as chief of the western borders. Because of the ugliness of his visage, [the king] gave his family the name 'House of Angegh.' "

The historian continues, addressing his patron, the Bagratid prince [Sahak Bagratuni]: "But if you wish, I can relate inappropriate and foolish falsehoods about him, just as the Persians relate about Rostom Sagchik, claiming that he had the strength of 120 elephants."

"In fact, his strength and audacity are celebrated in very inconsistent songs, songs which even go beyond what is told about Samson, Heracles, or Sagchik. For in these songs they relate that he would take in his hands hard stones without any cracks, crush them into large and small pieces, and then, with his fingernails shape them into tablets, polish them, and draw on them the shapes of eagles and other things." (Movse's Xorenats'i, *History of Armenia*, II. 8).

In this description it is especially noteworthy that Tork' etches on the rocks the figures of eagles and other birds. The feudal fortress of the princes of Angegh, which still exists in our own day, is situated on a high hill near Argana, to the north of Diarbekir, the center of the ancient principality of Angilene which, apparently, had

preserved rock monuments with the images of eagles even in the times of our historian, who took them for the work of the giant Tork'. The conjectures of Movse's Xorenats'i relating to the archaeological facts of the country are always important. Certainly the hero Tork' is a mythological reminiscence of the god Tarku, which may be connected with the eagle in some way.

It is not known what the physionomy of this god was, or how he appeared to his worshippers. To the present, archaeological materials which have been unearthed provide no information about this.

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The account of the Armenian historian may serve as a basis for an inquiry into the origin of Tarku.

It seems that at least in Armenia, the god Tarku was sometimes worshipped in the form of an eagle or, more correctly, a vulture.

The Anonymous Historian, or in Sebeos' work, pseudo Marabas, always recognizes Angegh as a god named Tork'. "Bagarat also bore the name Angegh, and in those days the barbarian tribes called him a god." This is an allusion to a hidden connection between Tork' Angegh and Tarku, just as the root *baya* (in Bagarat) may be identified with Tarku.

Under the influence of popular etymology, Movse's Xorenats'i thought to derive *Angegh* from the Armenian word *an-gegh* ("not beautiful," "ugly"). Actually, this word should be identified with *anggh* or *angegh*, which means "vulture." In the Armenian translation of the Bible, the Greek words ἀετός, γρύψ, ἀλιάετός, γῦψ, ἰκτῖνος correspond to *artsui* (արծուի), *korch* (կործ) or *paskuch* (պասկուի), *getartsui* (գետարծուի), and *ts'in* (ցիւ) (Leviticus 11.13 and Deuteronomy 14.13).

The origin of *anggh* = γῦψ is unknown. Similarly, the etymologies of all the remaining Greek words in the above list are mysterious, with the exception of the last one, ἰκτῖνος, which corresponds to Armenian *ts'in* (ցիւ), zend. *Saena*.

[The dictionary of] Hesychius contains a word with striking similarity to the Armenian word *anggh*, ἄγλυ. ὁ κύκνος ὑπὸ Σκυθῶν ["'Aglu.' Scythian 'swan' "]. A more or less acceptable Indo-European etymology for this Scythian word has not been proposed yet. Its connection with [the Latin word] *aquila*, *aquilus* is very doubtful. Could there be a connection between ἄγλυ and Armenian *anggh*? To me, this conjecture does not seem untenable. To clarify the phonetic aspects, it would be useful to consider that the Armenian word also is written in the form *ankgh*. Now let us turn to an examination of the word *tarku*.

In Greek there exists the word τόργος, which means "vulture." This is the very bird whose feathers Zeus borrowed when he sported with Leda. On the other hand, in the works of Lycophorus (#87.), τόργος is called ὕγρόφοιτος, that is, it could be seen as a type of ἀλιάετος (Armenian *getartsui*/ գետարծուի, "osprey, sea-eagle"). In any case, these semantic nuances are not so important here.

Τόργος is connected with English *stork* and German *Storch*. They all derive from a root which means "harm, wrong, injury" [French *tort*] (Boisacq, *Dict. étym.*). It would be difficult not to associate this with a homophonous Caucasian word having the same meaning. In the language of the Avars, who form one of the mountain tribes of the Caucasus [188], and whose language belongs to the Lezgi family, they call "vulture" *itarkou* (*The Avars Language*, C. Graham, *JRAS* 1881, XIV, 3).

This suggests that *tarku* also is a Scythian word, just like ἄγλυ, since in antiquity the Avars were grouped within the broad family of tribes designated under the general name of Scythians/Scyths. The Avars pronounce this word as *ətarku*, almost *tarku*.

As for *Pask'am*, the generic name for Tork', it is most interesting that it too contains a component which has the sense of *vulture*.

In the Bible, the Greek word γρῦψ is translated once as *korch*, and the other time as *paskuch*. (This last form also is met with in the *Armenian Geography/Ashxarhats'oyts'* of the 7th century. There it says that the *paskuch* comes "from the land of Syunik' and that the *phagre* (a bony fish) attacks it. From the blow, both fall into the sea and drown" [*Geography*, p. 44]).

The alternation of *paskuch* and *korch* leads us to equate the final *kuch* with *korch*. The form of the same word in Georgian is *paskouji*. There is also the word *kanji* in Georgian, which means "sea eagle" and which, it appears, is related to *kouji*. Grigor Magistros mentions a word *kand*, "male eagle," an otherwise unknown word which very possibly is another form of *kanji*.

We must not exclude Georgian *k'ori* ("vulture") which corresponds to *-kunji* in the same way as the constituent *kuri* ("ear") corresponds to *kuj* or *k'omori* ("husband"), since one is the Karthvelian form and the other, the Mingrelian.

In any case, at present the etymology of these words is not so interesting to us. The words for "eagle" and "vulture" in Armenian, as well as in Georgian and even in Greek, are still in need of special investigation.

For our purposes it is enough to establish that *paskuch* is a bird of the eagle family, either a land, sea, or shore eagle capable of exploits over the water.

Thus the grandfather of the giant Tork' bears the name Pask'am. One might reasonably derive this name from *paskuch* ("sea eagle") and regard it as formed on the same principle as the names Gegh-am, Bag-am, and Arsh-am.

In this manner the three names of the Armenian hero, Tork', Angegh, and Pask'am, reveal their immediate connection to some bird of the eagle type. What could this unusual relation signify?

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The cult of birds, along with those of other animals, held a respectable place in ancient religions. Often Greek and Indian mythologies present the gods as associated with some bird, which accompanies them as a devoted servant.

According to the perceptions of the ancients, the gods had a special fondness for birds and animals, and therefore their presence in sanctuaries was considered necessary. Actually, this is a question of the survival of totemic animal-worship. The animals that were worshipped incarnated the gods themselves. The famous raven and the dove in the Deluge legend are merely echoes of the ancient belief that they are bearers of the divine essence.

Among sacred birds, the eagle especially is accorded a place as a bird-totem. It is the eagle which oversees production of all the heavenly beverage, nectar or ambrosia. Among the Indians, it is also the eagle which brings the beverages *sauma* and *madhu*. The eagle also regulates lightning and thunder, causing the lightning bolt and bringing rain (Gruppe, *Mythologie* p. 792).

The eagle, as well as other animals serving the gods, are nothing more than ancient totems, previously gods, but now in an extremely degraded state. Retreating before the new gods, the ancient gods have retained modest positions as assistants of the new supreme masters or as executors of their will. When Zeus adorned himself with the plumage of Torgos, that is to say, when he took on the image of that bird, it means that Zeus had ascended to Torgos' throne.

A similar phenomenon must have occurred in Armenia regarding the cult of the vulture. Teshub is, above all, the god of lightning and thunder. He is the Asianic Jupiter *Fulminator* [Jupiter *Tonans*]. The cult of Teshub was well known in Armenia, especially in the kingdom of Van. It is here, probably, in this corner of his vast domain, that Teshub collided with the ancient local god Paskuch', and absorbed him. The vanquished god, though ceding his

temple to his new heir, nonetheless was able to impose his own name and symbols on him. Thus Teshub appears in new finery, just as Zeus does in the feathers of Targos.

Tarkhu is none other than Teshub's double, and seems to have been revered in the form of a vulture. Images of the heads of winged vultures have been found on archaeological monuments. Two similar figures, with their hands upraised as though holding up the sky [190] show well the descent of the old gods to the state of simple genies. (**Hetitische Kunst**, Ernest Wasmuth, Berlin, d'après D. G. Hogarth, **Carchemish**, pl. B. 12, 1914).

Excavations of prehistoric necropolises have uncovered, among other things, drawings of human figures always topped by the head of a bird (Morgan *Mission scientifique au Caucase*, I, p. 141, 165, 181). Do these pictures represent plain archers or a god with a bird's head? And if we really are dealing with simple hunters, it still seems that their pictures have been copied from the pictures of gods.

The winged disk, well known as a symbol of the supreme deity in Egypt, Mesopotamia and Iran, is a survival of a bird god.

Following the decline of the bird as a totem, its role seems to have been transformed, over time, into that of a simple letter-carrier for the gods. Perhaps this is the Iranian word *angar* ἄγγαρος which specifically characterizes this service of the letter-carrier.

According to Hesychius: ἄγγαρος. ἐργάτης. ἡ λέξις δὲ Περσικὴ σημαίνει δὲ καὶ τοὺς ἐκ διαδοχῆς Βασιλικοὺς γραμματοφόρους ["*'Angaros.'* worker. a Persian word also signifying the hereditary royal letter-carrier"].

In Suidas' dictionary: οὕτως ἐκάλουν οἱ Πέρσαι τοὺς Βασιλείων ἀγγέλους ["This is how the Persians style the royal heralds"].

The Iranian word *angaros* is the equivalent of Greek ἄγγελος in its meaning and also phonetically. Both are inseparable from the Armenian forms *անգղ/անգեղ/անկղ* [anggh/angegh/ankgh] ("vulture"), that is, they have a religious origin, and their primitive meaning is concealed in the Armenian word.

From vulture-god to Christian angel is a long distance, but it is not one that cannot be traversed. The Armenian *angegh* also has traversed it, going from the name of a god to the name of a hero.

When speaking about Tarku, we cannot avoid discussing the ethnic eponym "Thorgama/T'orgoma/T'orgom." Its connection with the Asianic god is quite certain. It derives from the name Tarku (tar-ku) in the same way as Pria-mus, Teut-amus, and other names.

From ancient times, commentators on the Bible have not agreed on the ethnic belonging of the eponym T'orgoma. Because the cult of Tarku was widespread throughout Asia Minor, all the nations of this part of the world could be candidates for the eponym.

Flavius Josephus testifies that in his time the Greeks attributed the origin of the name to the Phrygians: Θοργάμης δὲ Θοργαμαίους οἱ δόξαν Ἑλλησι Φρύγες ὠνομάσθησαν ["[Of Gomer's three sons...] Thorgama founded the Thorgamaians who, as the Greeks resolved, were named Phrygians." *Antiquities of the Jews*, 126].

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Eusebius of Caesarea (*Chron.*, II, 12), and Syncellus who follows him (Θοργαμὰ ἐξ οὗ Ἀρμένιοι, éd. Binn, p. 91 ["Torgama, from whom the Armenians (descend)"]), as well as other ecclesiastical writers, prefer to regard the Armenians as descendants of Torgama. It is a curious coincidence that the dispute is framed as occurring between two peoples, the Phrygians and the Armenians, whose kinship was known at least from Herodotus' time [5th century B.C.].

At present, this dispute may be resolved in favor of the Armenians. Some scholars place the territory of the Torgomids in the basin of the northern Euphrates River (Dilman, *Genesis*, p.172). Others are inclined to equate it

with Til-Garimmu, which is a settlement near the city of Melitene or Malatya, which is mentioned in a cuneiform inscription of Sargon, from the beginning of the 8th century B.C. (F. Delitsch, *Wo lag das Paradies*, p. 246).

Professor Sayce considers this view "not very probable" (*The Higher Criticism*, p. 131).

Sayce's doubt is quite legitimate. Such a modest locality as the fortress of Til-Garimmu could not generate an eponym that was so popular in antiquity.

It is preferable to associate the origin of Togarmah/T'orgoma's name with the name of a deity. Many cases are known where tribes owed their names to the gods they worshipped, for example the Khaldians from Khaldi, the Assyrians from Assur.

The list in the 10th chapter of Genesis makes Togarmah a son of Gomer, with Askanaz and Riphath for his brothers. Flavius Josephus, who derived the house of Togarmah from Phrygia, for the sake of consistency has reserved the neighboring land of Galatia for the clan of Gomer (*Ant. Jud.*, p. 123).

It happens that the Armenians call Cappadocia *Gamirk'*, a result of the fact that the center of the Cimmerian hordes was precisely in that country.

Genesis provides a table of the distribution of peoples in the 7th century B.C., at the time of the invasion of the Cimmerians and the appearance of the Armenians on the Armenian Plateau (Sayce, *op. cit.*, p. 153). It would be strange if Armenia or Urartu—lands located on such renowned rivers of the Bible—would not be mentioned in this table. Having placed Gomer in Cappadocia, [the authors of the table] naturally would have situated his sons Togarmah/T'orgoma and Askanaz in the immediate neighborhood, in Armenia.

Askanaz is the eponym of the Scyths, *Achkouzi* in the cuneiform inscriptions, just as Gomer is the eponym of the Cimmerians, the *Gimirri* of the Assyrians. (The Scyths were known among the Iranians under the [192] name of *saka*, from which, probably the designations scythe <* sak-inth or achkouzi < achk-ounzi emerged

Now one of Armenia's districts bears the name of Sakasene "built by the Sakas," which probably arose from being their settlement which thus preserved their name.

The name of the other brother, Thorgama, must be located between Cappadocia and Sakasene, in Armenia. Riphath's allotment is not known, and so we put him aside.

For more precisely pinpointing the homeland of Thorgama, we need to look in the southern part of Armenia, especially in Angelene/Angeh, the properties of the hero Tork'. The words of the prophet (Jeremiah, 27. 14) about the horses and cavalry of the house of Thorgama, in the marketplace of Tyre, are better suited to coming from neighboring Armenia rather than from distant Phrygia. Since Armenia was trading with Babylon from remote antiquity (Herodotus, I, 194), there is nothing surprising if it supplied the market in neighboring Syria with horses.

The southern part of Armenia has the most qualifications to be designated as the place where the name T'orgom emerged, based on the cult of the god Tarku in that very area. In the future, this name would have spread everywhere as Tarku became the supreme deity. There is another locality which bears the name Angegh, now Alashkert in Bagrewand district, which, as its name "Bagrewand" indicates, was known for its sanctuaries. At Getabek, located between Gandzak and Lake Sevan, an enigmatic inscription was discovered in which, Hommel believes, the "W" symbol must have been the ideogram for Tarku (*V. B. Anth. Ges.*, 1899, p. 667).

As regards the aspect under which Tarku was worshipped in Armenia—in the form of a vulture, a figure associated with lightning and thunder in mythology—it has survived to our own day in a most remarkable fashion. In the Armenian monastery known as Bardzrahayeats' ("High View"), near the village of Angegh, there is a special lamp called the "lightning lamp" which they light during thunderstorms. It is regarded as a type of

lightning-rod. Surely this is a remembrance of the old god Tarku who is present in that same sanctuary which in its time, was his own temple.

There is another Armenian monastery near the city of Bitlis, called the monastery of Saint George [Surb Geworg], famous for its vigilant rooster. The monastery is situated in a mountainous spot where abundant snow and bad weather [193] during the course of a long winter make travel difficult. The monastery, which is also a lodging place for travellers, has an intelligent rooster which announces in a loud cry if travellers may continue along their way without danger. No one dares to leave the monastery if that bird has not given the signal.

What may be said about this marvellous rooster which predicts the weather in the neighborhood of a sanctuary? Is it not the guardian of the posthumous legacy of the vulture-god? It was the vulture Tarku who, formerly, regulated celestial phenomena as the all-powerful master. After so many centuries and disruptions, the pagan belief has found sanctuary behind Christian walls. This is a glowing example of the tenacity of religious conservatism.

The vulture has been replaced by a rooster. One might suspect Aryo-European influence here. Veneration of the rooster is well attested in the *Avesta*. It is no less known among modern Yezidis. The replacement of the vulture by the rooster began even in the times of Tarku.

The West also recognized the sacred rooster and its power over thunder and lightning. It is as a survival of this power that tall buildings, especially churches, often are surmounted by a lightning-rod in the form of a rooster.

In addition, it is not only in Armenia that the vulture has preceded the rooster on the divine throne. Recently, C. Autran, in his ethnological and linguistic work, believes that he has uncovered the Asianic origin of the word "Egypt," deriving it from the word *rjipyā* (*çyena*) which means "falcon" or "divine eagle." According to this etymology, "Egypt" means "the country of the falcon god" (*Tarkondemos*, p. 182).

The same scholar has made a more audacious proposal regarding the Mesopotamian god, Sin. In his view, this name also derives from the same word *çyena*, "falcon." We note in passing that the Armenian form "ts'in" (*għu* "falcon/kite") is even more suitable.

In any case, there is a more definite fact beyond these perhaps problematic connections. In Egypt, the god Horus was represented as a hawk with a crown on its head. Horus, who became the son of Isis, is none other than the Asianic Attis, an Egyptian version of Cybele's son, that is, Teshub or Tarku. If Horus is a hawk, there is no difficulty with Tork' being a vulture.

Some have believed it possible to derive the name of the Egyptian god Horus from the word *huru* with the meaning of "high" and "sublime" (Ed. Meyer, *Roscher*, Lex., I, 2746). Despite the great authority of the author, this etymology could be [194] contested. From antiquity, the appellation "high/sublime" has customarily been applied to deities generally, and is not something unique in this case.

Horus was, first and foremost, a hawk and was worshipped as a fetish or totem. Consequently, it is quite natural that the name simply means "hawk."

If indeed words of Asianic origin have been preserved in Egyptian, as C. Autran has demonstrated, then there is no great obstacle in suggesting a Caucasian-Scythian word to juxtapose with Horus.

In Georgian, "hawk" is *k'or-i*. The Asianic guttural is easily transformed to *-h* (compare *hati*, *Kata*, Armenian *kats'in*, Greek ἄξινη, and Aramaic *hasina*). In Hesychius' lexicon, the Georgian word is described as follows: κείρις. ὄρνοεν, ἕραξ, κίρις, κίρρις, εἶδος ιεράκος ["'Keyris'. a bird, hawk, [also pronounced] 'kiris', 'kirris'. A type of hawk"]. In Armenian, the word *ուր-ուր* *ur-ur* or *օր-օր* *o'r-o'r*, which has the same meaning, very likely is related to Georgian *k'ori*, and is nothing other than a repetition of the word *our*, or <*hor (compare Armenian "ori", "arjnagr'av" ["crow"] and Georgian *or-bi* "eagle").

There is yet another similarity in the fates of Tarku and Horus: both lost their divinity and were transformed into ordinary heroes. Horus finally was assimilated into the figure of Saint George (Clermont-Ganneau, *Revue Archéologique*, n.s. 32, p. 196. "Horus et Saint-Georges"). The marvellous rooster at the monastery of Saint George, similarly, seems to have inherited some of the rays of Tarku's past glory.

The transformation of Horus into a Christian saint speaks in favor of the comparison of the god Tarku with the giant Tork'.

In this brief exposition an Armenian contribution may be added to the rich treasury of traditions about Tarku—traditions which [C. Autran], the author of the book *Tarkondemos*, collected with such diligence and expertise.
